

Coins

The 1913 Liberty nickels: High-priced cunning

By Roger Boye

THE WAY THE United States Mint administrators had planned it back then, 1912 was to be the last year for the Liberty nickel [it had been made since 1883].

The following year, the new Buffalo nickel would be put into circulation; so there was no need to make Liberty nickels dated 1913, they reasoned.

But someone at the mint managed to foul up these plans. Working surreptitiously, this person got hold of dies for a 1913 Liberty nickel [the dies apparently had been made earlier, just in case the design for the Buffalo nickel was not approved].

Then, apparently using mint equipment, he made five 1913 Liberty nickels. The nickels were kept undercover [they were never circulated] until they were displayed at a coin convention in 1920.

Last month, one of those five coins, sometimes called the prince of U.S. rarities, was sold for \$135,000. This specimen was once owned by King Farouk of Egypt [he paid \$3,750 for it in 1944], and was shown on a "Hawaii Five-O" television program in late 1974 [it was the subject of a robbery attempt].

Another of the five coins is part of the Louis Eliasberg collection currently on display at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia.

FOR THE FIRST time, a Canadian coin has sold for "six figures."

One of two known 1911 Canadian silver dollars brought a \$110,000 bid in a Toronto auction last month. The 1911 Canadian dollar is a pattern, a coin struck in limited quantity as a design sample and not for circulation.

The other known 1911 dollar is in the Royal Mint Museum in London.

A MAJORITY OF coin collectors surveyed by

the U.S. Mint approve of the packaging for U.S. proof and uncirculated sets.

The mint makes proof sets in a 5½-by-3¼-inch hard plastic holder with a movable cover. Uncirculated sets [also called mint sets] are packed, less elaborately, in a clear substance known as pliofilm.

Proof set packaging received more favorable votes [83 per cent] in the mint poll than uncirculated set packaging [56 per cent]. In addition, 62 per cent of the respondents said they would like the mint to produce uncirculated sets in two types of packages, with one more suitable for gift giving.

The poll results surprised some observers. For example, Numismatic News Weekly editorialized that it had received "numerous complaints in the last couple of years about broken hinges, split cases, and generally inferior workmanship on some of the packaging materials."

The mint surveyed 15,400 of its 2.4 million mail-order customers.